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REPLY

OF

H. W.

MR. HILLIARD, OF ALABAMA,

TO

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MR. STANLY, OF NORTH CAROLINA,

DELIVERED



IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, THURSDAY, MARCH 7, 1850.

WASHINGTON:
PRINTED AT THE CONGRESSIONAL GLOBE OFFICE.
1850.

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EXPLANATION—PERSONAL AND POLITICAL.

The House being in Committee of the Whole on the state of the Union, (Mr. BOYD, of Kentucky, in the Chair,) and the floor having been yielded, for the purposes of explanation, to Messrs. HILLIARD and STANLY—

Mr. HILLIARD rose and said:

Mr. CHAIRMAN: The Methodist Episcopal Church, with which I have been connected since I attained manhood, devolves on certain of its members, engaged in the various pursuits of life, the duty of enforcing, occasionally in public, the religious truths held by that body of Christians. This duty has been devolved on me by that church. I am not insensible to the criticism to which it subjects me; but such are my convictions in regard to the duty, that I have no purpose of relinquishing it, while I live. A sense of this religious obligation, has restrained me on all occasions, in my intercourse with society, from any departure from the most perfect courtesy. Since my connection with the Congress of the United States, I have habitually forbore to trespass on the rights, or even the feelings, of any of its members. If on any occasion I had done so from inadvertence, I should, when reminded of it, have promptly repaired the wrong. My self-respect, as well as a sense of justice, dictated this course; and that I have uniformly adhered to it, is well known to gentlemen with whom I have had the honor to serve on this floor for years past. I may safely appeal to gentlemen on both sides of the chamber to sustain me in this statement.

On the other hand, I have at all times supposed that no gentleman would allow himself to allude in any offensive sense to my religious profession. There exists a strong disposition in vulgar minds to do this, but I believe that no one has so far violated the rules of decorum as to do so, with two exceptions.

A member from Pennsylvania, who addressed the committee some days since, [Mr. STEVENS,] felt himself at liberty to urge me to call on my illustrious friend, as he styled the President of the United States, and announce to him, in inspired language, his impending doom. He selected the very language which I was to utter in the ear of the President, "Accursed is the man stealer;" and I was to add to this a solemn entreaty to him to abandon his slave property, if he desired to escape the Divine wrath. I shall not offer a single remark in regard to the offensiveness of this language, in its application to the Chief Magistrate of the nation, or to myself as a member of this House; but shall leave it to that prompt condemnation which

it will meet from every man who has any just sense of propriety.

The other exception to which I refer, is the member from North Carolina, who spoke yesterday. That member thought proper to charge me, without a single provocation, on my part, with "desecrating the Scriptures, by quotations from them, urging the citizens of the United States to shed each other's blood;" and he proceeded, farther, to charge me with a design to break up this Union. These charges were gratuitously made; it was not my purpose, to interfere with the member, in the course of his speech. His very gross allusion to me, drew from me an unpremeditated and indignant denial. Gross as the assault upon me was—none could be more so—I should have replied to it in less offensive language. A moment's reflection would have enabled me to do so, but my indignation was, for the moment, irrepressible. I pronounced it "false," as it most certainly was. Still, sir, however little respect was due to the member who could bring against me such an atrocious charge, I ought to have checked an indignation, which, however natural it is to feel under such an outrage, impelled me to make a harsher reply than I could have desired to make, in a cooler moment. But, sir, it was an impulse which every generous man will at once understand and excuse.

In looking around this arena, Mr. Chairman, the member had a perfect right to select his adversary; but however much the world may applaud the discretion with which the member exercised his right in singling me out, it will not be likely to award him an ovation for any success which he may win in the contest. He thought it proper—perhaps I should say *prudent*—to pass by all others, and to throw his gauntlet immediately at my feet, as he entered the gladiatorial ring—at the moment in which he referred to me in a manner which almost every other member of the House, but himself, would have felt should shield me from assault. I repeat, sir, the world may applaud the member's discretion, whatever it may say of his manliness.

Now, sir, I deny that I have on any occasion employed the Scriptures for the purpose which the member charges on me. Indeed, I have never drawn upon them, as I remember, for any purpose whatever, in the debates of this House. I have never sought to vindicate slavery by a single quotation from them. In my late speech, I expressly declined to argue the question affecting the

rights of the people represented by me, in respect to slavery, on moral grounds; because the argument would admit the jurisdiction of the forum; and I urged none but political considerations in support of those rights.

Much less, sir, have I at any time sought to bring the authority of the sacred volume to the support of violent measures. I distinctly and emphatically repel the charge. Let my speech be examined, and it will be found that the charge of the member from North Carolina is without even the coloring of truth. It was, I am confident, hastily uttered. It proceeded from the unbalanced character of that member's mind, and his malignant disposition toward southern members who might be supposed ready to condemn his extraordinary course at this critical conjuncture. If I had thought proper to search the Scriptures for guidance at this time, I am quite sure that I should have found nothing in them to encourage an abandonment of duty by one who is entrusted by his constituents with the high functions of a representative; nor to favor a treasonable surrender, on his part, of the rights which he was chosen to uphold and defend. I am here as the representative of others. Their rights are committed to my keeping. Whatever I may encounter, I shall vigorously and faithfully contend for those rights. I find nothing in human or Divine teachings, to encourage me to do otherwise. On the contrary, if I could shrink from their maintenance, because of any apprehension of encountering opposition from the open enemies or false friends of those rights, I should incur the censure of the whole Christian and political world. In my late speech, I made a single brief quotation from the Scriptures, the object of which could not be tortured to mean what the member has charged, but asserted what every one must admit to be true, that in a constitutional government, political truth, like revealed truth, must be open to the freest discussion—a right denied only by a despotic government—which enforces tranquillity by the crushing might of power—and formidable only to tyrants and to traitors.

The other charge brought by the member, in his heedless manner, as to my disposition to break up the Union, is also without any foundation in fact. It is an error into which he has fallen from the present temper of his mind, which inclines him to suspect every southern man, who says a word in behalf of his section, of hostility to the Union. All such members, he undertakes to arraign and censure.

I challenge him or any other member of this House to produce a single remark of mine which favors the scheme of disunion. No man living is more profoundly devoted to the Union than I am. We owe to it our prosperity, our power, and our glory. Its destruction would involve our own country in irretrievable ruin, and it would spread dismay through the ranks of the friends of liberty in every part of the world.

So far from looking to its disruption as a remedy for political evils, I would put my life in peril, at any hour, to save it. To my vision, it seems to be invested with dangers. I have pointed them out; I have appealed earnestly to the patriotism of this body to save the Union, by a wise, just, and noble use of power. This would avert impending troubles, while it would insure, for the whole

country, a glorious future. It would strengthen the UNION. I claim to be as true a friend to the Union as the member from North Carolina. We differ in this: I stand with my people; he takes occasion, at this conjuncture, when his section is threatened, by the overwhelming power of a majority, to approach the feet of power, and to give it whatever aid his abilities, or his position, may enable him to furnish. He spoke of the wrongs which his section has endured, in terms which were listened to with satisfaction only by those who oppose the very rights which he was sent here to uphold and vindicate. His course of remark could hardly fail to fill southern men with indignation, and even northern men with contempt. He goes over the whole field of controversy, and cannot find a single grievance of which the South has a right to complain—not even the disregard of the constitutional provision to surrender fugitives from labor, which northern gentlemen themselves admit to be a wrong. He becomes, indeed, the champion of the majority; invites them to press their measures, and threatens his own people, if they resist, with the military power of the Government.

However ready I may be, on all proper occasions, to do homage to the high qualities of the North, I cannot, at a moment like this—when the whole strength of that powerful section of the Union is arrayed against the South—hesitate to take part with the people, among whom Providence has cast my lot, in the great struggle through which they are now passing. Nor can I comprehend how any southern man—acquainted with the history of his country, familiar with the wrongs to which the South has been subjected, in regard to the question now before Congress—can, for a moment, forget, or forsake, the cause of that generous and gallant people. The nobler sympathies of our nature—in the absence of all the obligations of patriotism—should impel us to range ourselves on the side of the feeble against the strong. The course of the member from North Carolina seems to me to outrage both; it does violence alike to the nobler impulses of our nature, and the dictates of patriotism; and, whether it is considered in regard to me or to his country, it is not likely to be commended for its elevation, its generosity, or its manliness.

A gentleman from New York, [Mr. WHITE,] who sits before me, I observe intimates that he approves the course of the gentleman from North Carolina, in coming to the aid of the North at this conjuncture, and says, that the gentleman from North Carolina sees things through the same medium that he does. That is more than I have charged; for the gentleman from New York has, on every occasion when a question came up affecting the rights of the South, voted against the South. He has, on every occasion, from first to last, voted for the Wilmot proviso, and sustained Gerr's resolution as to slavery in the District of Columbia.

These gentlemen, sir—the one coming from New York, and the other from North Carolina—sent here by constituencies so widely differing upon this question, see things through the same medium!

I thank the gentleman from New York for the timely remark. He admits the extraordinary position of the member from North Carolina; and he accounts for it by saying, that "they see

things through the same medium.' Such are the commendations which a southern Representative receives when he lends himself to carry out the objects of northern power.

Sir, when at home, I did what I could to allay sectional feeling. I spoke for the Union; I pointed to its glorious ensign, floating in conscious pride over this broad continent, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and borne by our adventurous seamen into all the waters of the globe. I urged the people who surrounded me, and to whom the wildest appeals were addressed by those who undertook to ride me down, to cherish a patriotic regard for the whole country; and I assured them that no act of aggression on their rights would be made by Congress, and that if it were attempted, the act would be arrested by the President of their choice. But, sir, standing here, in the midst of the Representatives of other States, I have felt it to be my duty, to resist every measure which would be regarded by the people, for whom I speak, as an encroachment on their rights or their honor, and to urge upon this great body, representing the whole country, the views which they entertain of a question which so deeply affects them. To have done otherwise, would, in my judgment, have been a gross abandonment of duty—duty to my immediate constituents, and to my whole country. While I have thus aimed to do my duty here faithfully and efficiently, I have in my correspondence with those I represent, contributed what I could to encourage a sound sentiment at home—to repress, rather than to excite dissatisfaction. I have stated my hope in the just action of Congress, and my confidence in the President. I have discouraged all movements toward effecting a sectional organization, believing that an occasion would not arise, calling for any other means of redress, than those which the forms of the Government afford. In the early part of the session, when it was impossible to foresee what would be done, I joined my colleagues in addressing a letter to the Governor, in the hope, that the real sentiment of the people of Alabama would be uttered in firm and moderate resolutions on the part of the Legislature, and that the Executive of the State would be empowered, in the event of a serious aggression being made by this Government upon their rights, to bring the subject before the people themselves, to decide upon it, as they alone have the right to do.

Such, sir, has been my course, adopted under a high sense of duty. My aim has been to maintain the rights of the people represented by me, and, at the same time, to avert from the Union every cause of trouble—so little do I deserve to be classed with those who desire to break up the Union. God grant that it may out-ride every storm!

It is not to be denied, that those who represent a feeble section, must sometimes appear to be impracticable. Their constituents depend, for their security, upon a strict observance of the organic law. This they must insist upon; it may put them in conflict with a majority; their firmness may even threaten shocks to the system; but they must hold their position—for when they abandon it, they surrender the rights, which they were appointed to guard, to the unchecked dominion of power. This Government, without the Constitution, would be an absolute despotism.

Those of us who have contended for the rights of the southern people, and have demanded for them the protection of the Government, may be denounced for a time—traitors may assail us—the surges will dash against us—but when the storm is gone by, and the great question now before us is settled, reason and truth will reassert their dominion, and will vindicate us against the charge of faction. It will then be seen how much we have contributed to restore the action of the Government to its true course, and that determined resistance to aggression is the only effectual mode of maintaining conservative principles.

In our contests here, sir, this must be borne in mind. In the language of Edmund Burke, "something must be allowed to the spirit of liberty." I shall do my duty; no considerations shall deter me from it—no reproaches can discourage—no threats can intimidate me. Harmony can only be maintained throughout this wide-spread Republic by a wise, patriotic, and noble use of power. The people in every part of it must feel that their rights are protected. To wield the power of the Government, either to enrich one section at the expense of another, or to destroy the securities which protect the property of every portion of the people, must give rise to dissatisfaction; and if the wrong be heavy enough, it will occasion angry and even fatal convulsions. The right of revolution resides in every people under Heaven; and there are wrongs which will drive them to the exercise of it, unless they are already fit to be made slaves. No people, who comprehend and love liberty, will bear too heavy a pressure from power. *He who stands ready, as the representative of a free people, to surrender their rights to the demands of power, and to proclaim that no wrongs can drive them into resistance to their Government, is already dead to the noble impulses which can alone preserve liberty.*

If, sir, this Union could be maintained by force—if it could exist after the whole power of the Government came to be employed against the property of the people of one half of the States—what generous or right-minded man, come from what section he may, would not prefer to maintain it by a just exercise of the political functions which he holds—by a magnanimous forbearance in the use of strength—than by military power?

Sir, this Union can be perpetuated—not by force—not by bayonets—but by cherishing the spirit which gave it its existence, and by a rigid adherence to the Constitution. I take this occasion to say, that I ask for no amendment to the Constitution; let it stand; let it be observed in letter and spirit. May it be perpetual! I do not desire to throw any additional obstacles in the way of a speedy settlement of the great question now pending. I earnestly desire to see it disposed of in a spirit which will inspire fresh confidence in the Government, and give new strength to the Union.

The member from North Carolina, in his extraordinary speech yesterday, did not content himself with inviting us to accompany him to the tomb of Washington, whither we should all have gone as willing pilgrims; but he alluded to Jackson, in such terms, as to revive party animosities, which have hardly yet had time to die out, and which, at this moment especially, ought not to be revived. He spoke of his exertions for the preservation of the Union, and of the menaces which, at a certain period of our country's his-

tory, he had uttered. He then passed to the President of the United States, and hoped that the same special Providence which had preserved the lives of the two illustrious men already alluded to, would keep him; and that he, too, might be able, in spite of all resistance, to save the Union. How would that gentleman wish him to preserve it?

By military power? By the exercise of his great abilities as a military leader? Sir, I greatly misconceive the character of the President, if he would not infinitely prefer to serve his country, and to save the Union, by employing pacific measures, than by an appeal to arms. My confidence in the President is unlimited. Recognizing in him great qualities, which fitted him, as I believed, for a faithful and efficient performance of Executive trusts I contributed, what I could, to secure his nomination at Philadelphia. I had the impression that the member from North Carolina was opposed to it. He now informs me that he was not, but aided to bring it about. I, with pleasure, accept his statement of the fact, and thank him—at least, for that.

He says, however, that he was not in a Methodist Church in that city. If he had sometimes visited such places, his morals and his manners would probably both be better than they are to-day. The remark only discloses the incurable proneness of the member to a line of conduct, which must prove far more injurious to him than it can possibly be to others.

As my position puts it out of my power to appeal to the only considerations which seem to be potential in holding him to the observance of a decent demeanor, I must, of course, expect to hear from him the rudest remarks which his nature can suggest. No one will be at loss to account for such a display of his spirit.

I was observing, sir, that my confidence in the President, so far from being diminished by a personal knowledge of him, has gained strength. I, too, look to him in this great crisis. The laurels which encircle his brow, have been nobly earned; he does not desire to have them crimsoned with fraternal blood. History has already claimed his military achievements for the brightest pages in which she records great exploits. I earnestly hope that the influence of his high station, and his great character, will, through all his future days, be thrown on the side of peace; that the evening of his life may be crowned with even more glorious trophies than war has yielded him; that his administration will be illustrated by an unwavering adherence to the Constitution; by a firm protection of the rights of the weak, whosoever they are threatened by the power of the strong; and that his country will hereafter rank him with her benefactors, less on account of the victories which he has won in the field, than for the triumphs which yet await him in a wise, just, and noble performance of the duties of the great office, to which he has been called by the American people.

